

Assessing The Need For So Many Assessors

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ALBANY, NY - Local governments across New York State could save as much as \$12.5 million annually by improving tax assessment procedures and sharing assessment duties with other governments, **according to a report** by New York State Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli.

"New York has one of the most complex property tax systems in the nation, but it doesn't have to," DiNapoli said in a statement.

According to DiNapoli, in 2009 New York's city, county, town and village assessing units spent \$132 million and employed 1,350 assessors, tax directors and assessment appraisers. While most states have fewer than 100 assessing units - and only seven have more than 500 - New York has approximately 1,110. Of those, 981 are towns and cities and two are counties.

Erie County Comptroller Mark Poloncarz couldn't agree more, and was quick to point out he's been beating the same drum for some time.

In 2008, Poloncarz issued his own report which in part suggested the possibility that all town and village assessors could be eliminated in favor of a county-wide bureau of assessment.

"And if we had consolidated those functions we could save millions," Poloncarz told WGRZ-TV.

"When we issued our report we didn't come up with any objections except from the assessors, their families, and those who were employed by the assessors," he said.

The **Town of Hamburg** also contains the Villages of Hamburg and Blasdell, and at one time all of them had assessors.

"The town would assess the same home for the town, county and school taxes, and then the village went out and assessed that home for just the village taxes so that home was being assessed twice," said Town Supervisor Steven Walters.

But more than 20 years ago, the decision

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was made to have the town do all the assessments and **eliminate** the village assessors. Walters says they haven't looked back since.

"It was cost neutral to the town, but for the villages it was a substantial cost savings," Walters told 2 On Your Side.

And while many local governments have followed suit, DiNapoli's report indicates 127 villages across the state are still assessing property within their borders for village taxes, while those properties are already assessed separately by towns or counties for county, town and school tax purposes.

DiNapoli claims that if those villages used town assessments instead, they could save \$3 million. The report also found that if local governments shared tax assessors, they could save between \$2.7 million and \$6.1 million annually.

DiNapoli's report also indicates municipalities in Erie County in particular have been slower than others in the state to adopt so called "multi -jurisdictional" assessment, where a single assessor, serves several towns.

Only a handful of local governments in Erie County have done so according to DiNapoli.

"In Erie County we have 30 assessing units alone, which is more than many states have," Poloncarz said.

While he has spent countless hours advocating for the **elimination** of entire

layers of municipal government, downsizing advocate Kevin Gaughan says efficiencies like those suggested by DiNapoli and Poloncarz are at least a step in the right direction.

"And against the backdrop of the recent census that shows that Erie County lost more than 30,000 people, while we've retained all of our 35 assessors here in Erie County, there's something wrong there," Gaughan said.

Click on the video player to watch our story from **2 On Your Side Reporter Dave McKinley** and Photojournalist Norm Fisher from Eden.

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